

Group 2 Citizens Advisory Panel

Question to be answered: How the policies or actions of the City could be improved to accommodate people who do not have an identified place to be; either during the day, or during the night?

The Panel's meeting began with a general discussion of homelessness and the need for a declaration that there is a health and public safety emergency inherent in having 1800 people living on the streets. We talked about our Community's response to the needs of people who are homeless, reviewed how the 10 Year Plan (Plan) came to be, and the commitment that is required to pursue implementation of the Plan. There was a strong consensus that the core element of the Plan, "ending homelessness by obtaining or building permanent supportive housing units" remains the strongly preferred strategy; and resources should not be diverted from the Community's effort to obtain, build, and operate more supportive housing units.

The City's policy regarding people on City property should be built on the principle that: people should be allowed to remain where they have chosen to be, as long as they are not disturbing the peace, or interfering with the rights of others. There needs to be education that promotes understanding that "downtown residents and businesses" should not object to the presence of homeless people on the street simply because they are not comfortable around homeless people, or they believe that the presence of homeless people may impair business activity.

The City policy regarding people sleeping on public property should be modified to reflect what Panel members understand to be the City's current practice that: all outdoor sleepers are treated similarly; people are not forced to move from a location unless there is an available shelter space for them to move into.

The Panel recommends that the City establish "Safe Zones" for campers, car campers and outdoor sleepers. This might be in designated parks or other City owned property. It would be advantageous if a portion of the "Safe Zone had a covered area. The people staying in the safe zones should be contacted by the outreach teams currently providing outreach to homeless people.

The Panel recommends that the City pursue and take advantage of any opportunity to expand shelter capacity in City or other government owned

buildings or structures that are not normally used during the 7:00 PM to 7:00 AM time period. Many models of self and professionally managed shelters are currently in use in the community and could be adapted to space in public buildings. The focus of any available resources should be on securing basic nighttime shelter. When prioritizing limited resources new nighttime shelter should take priority over additional day time services.

When discussing shelter opportunities the Panel reviewed the operating numbers for the “Bunk House”, a program operated by SHARE. Panel members are impressed with the efficiency of this shelter alternative. This facility/program houses a large number of people for a very modest cost. This alternative should be considered as part of the effort to develop additional shelter capacity.